

Making an ASS of yoU and ME by C_Sharpe

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Summary:

Coming out is hard. Having supportive friends can make all the difference in the world. That is, of course, assuming you were in to begin with.

Making an ASS of yoU and ME

Author's Note:

First off, I have nothing against Will being gay. This little story is actually a bit autobiographical. Just after high school, I had a close friend ask me point blank, in front of all our other friends, if I was gay. He was extremely supportive about it, but man, was that an awkward conversation. The reason I never dated in high school was due to me being an emotional basket case, but I could see where he was coming from. I've noticed that the fandom at large has more or less come to the conclusion that Will is gay, and that just reminded me of my own experience, and thus this little story was born. A few slurs in there, but only referenced, everybody is pretty supportive in this. This is the first thing I've posted, so if you notice something that I could improve on in the future, drop a comment.

It was just about noon on an average Wednesday in January 1988. Noon, as usual, found the Party at their usual lunch table in the Hawkins High cafeteria. They took up nearly a full half of the long table, occupying three seats on either side, alternating between eating and conversing. The arrangement varied from day to day, and today found one side of the table with Dustin at the end, Lucas next to Dustin, and Max next to Lucas. Jane (always Jane in school) sat opposite Max, Mike to her left and Will opposite Dustin at the end of the table.

Will was only paying half attention to the conversations around him, he had noted Max and El going on about something to do with one of their shared classes, while Mike, Lucas, and Dustin had revived one of their ongoing arguments about... something. It was either the X-Men one or the Spielberg one, and Will had long since lost interest in either one. He was content to doodle in the margins of the math notes he should be studying, absentmindedly munching on the too salty cafeteria tater tots he had appropriated from Mike when it was

clear he was too invested in proving his point to notice.

Will gradually became aware of a lull in the conversation, and cast a glance in Mike's direction to see if he had noticed Will's petty theft. Food theft wasn't covered specifically under Party rules, Dustin would have been booted long ago if it was. Still, it was objectively not cool, so he readied an apology in case Mike had noticed.

"So Will." Dustin was the one spoke up, suddenly capturing Will's wandering attention. "I just heard something interesting." Dustin continued.

"Oh yeah? What's up?" Will replied. He was looking at Dustin, so he didn't notice Mike next to him, eyes wide, head shaking slowly from side to side, mouthing "No" repeatedly.

"You know that guy, Greg Mullen? He was in gym with us last year?" Dustin asked.

"Uh, yeah. Yeah. Year behind us, blonde guy, right?" Will replied after thinking for a moment.

"Well, I have it on good authority that he is, you know, gay. Too." Dustin said, dropping into a conspiratorial whisper towards the end. "And he is single." Dustin waggled his eyebrows at the last bit.

Will stared at Dustin, mouth open in abject confusion. He looked around the table, finding all eyes locked on him, awaiting a reaction. It suddenly dawned on him. What Dustin was trying to say. Did everyone else already know?

"That's... great Dustin! Seriously. I'm glad you told me. I know that can't have been easy." Will said, putting his arm on Dustin's across the table. Dustin was looking quite smug, looking around the table at their friends. "So, are you thinking of, like, asking him out?" Will asked. Now it was Dustin's turn to look confused.

"What? Why would I ask him out?" Dustin asked. "I meant you should ask him out!"

"What?! Why would *I* ask him out?" Will asked, incredulous. "I thought you were coming out to me!" Will said.

“Nonononono. I was trying to help *you* come out. To... us.” Dustin said defensively.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” Will was yelling now, which was a rare enough occurrence that everyone flinched a bit. “You just assume that not only am I gay but I’d need your help to tell you guys about it? Jesus Dustin!”

“Well, you know. You’ve been through a lot, and you’re, you know, like... and you never show any interest in girls so we were talking and we figured that we could...” Dustin rambled before Will interjected.

“‘We’ Dustin? Who is ‘We’?” Will’s eyes looked all around the table, meeting guilty glance after guilty glance. Except El, who was watching with interest. “Were all of you in on this?” Will asked, anger rising again in his voice.

“We talked about it, but we all agreed not to say anything.” Mike said defensively, casting a look in Dustin’s direction.

“Look man, we weren’t, like talking shit about you, we were just worried about you a little.” Lucas added, looking ashamed.

“Not me. I told them it wasn’t our business.” El spoke up.

“Yes. All of us except Jane. Because Jane is perfect and never does anything wrong. Thank you for clearing that up.” Lucas retorted, frustrated.

“Welcome.” El said back, looking especially pleased with herself as she drank her orange soda from the can with a straw. (This behavior had actually caused an argument among the party about the correct way to drink from a can, which had ended when El had actually produced a diagram to prove her point. To this day it was a bit of a smug middle finger to anyone who still saw ‘poor little Eleven who doesn’t know anything about anything’ when they looked at her.)

“I wanted to set you up with a girl, for what its worth.” Max added. “They” she gestured to the boys, “were all like ‘I don’t know if that’s a good idea’ and started this whole discussion.”

The discussion in question:

It was a Sunday evening, and most of the Party was lounging in the Wheeler's basement. It was too cold to do anything out of the house, so they had settled into different spaces around the room, occupying themselves and talking occasionally.

Max was leaning back in her chair, feet casually resting atop the table usually reserved for D&D campaigns and party strategy meetings. She was working her way through a small pack of rubber bands she'd found, shooting them at the others and various objects around the basement.

"Quit it!" Mike yelled as one just barely got him on his left ear. "And get your dirty feet off the table!"

"Make me, nerd. You guys aren't using it anyway, and its a good footrest." Max said, unimpressed by Mike's commands.

"Why aren't you playing? You had to stop last night, didn't you want to finish?" El said, peeking up from her book. Mike was about to answer when he got distracted by El's book. Was that one of his mom's?

"That was the plan, but we're a man down tonight. Can't do anything without Will." Lucas called out, not looking away from the TV.

"Whats he doing anyway? I though he was gonna be here." Dustin said, equally invested in his recording of the previous night's WWF matches.

"He's with Jonathon. He's heading back tonight so they're having family time. I told you this like, two hours ago." Mike said, scratching something out from his notebook, he'd been using the extra time to fine tune the next steps of the campaign.

"I probably stopped listening after you said no Byers means no campaign. That was the pertinent information." Dustin said.

"You know, speaking of Will, I heard some girls talking in the bathroom last week. One of them sounded like she was crushing on our little Will." Max said, trying to get a second rubber band stuck in Dustin's hair. "I get that he's, like, beyond shy, but maybe we should try to set him up with someone?"

"Max, no offense, but why do *you* wanna be a matchmaker all of a sudden?" Lucas asked, turning to her.

"Because I am romantic as shit, stalker. I see Will getting some looks thrown his way around school. Why not help him out?" Max shot back.

"Do you even know any other girls, Mayfield?" Mike asked.

"Oh, because you're such a ladies man Wheeler. You wanna take over? Talk him up to all your lady friends?" Max responded. Mike opened his mouth, noted El's raised eyebrow, weighed his options, and closed it. There was no answer to that question where he came out okay.

"Will has been doing very good lately. He doesn't like people trying to do things for him. I don't think we should do anything." El said, closing her book.

"There's also... The other thing." Dustin said.

"Yeah." Lucas chimed in.

"What?" Mike and Max asked, nearly in unison.

Dustin and Lucas shared a look. Lucas nodded to Dustin, who stopped the tape and turned to better face the rest of the party.

"I believe that Will... embraces the love that dare not speak its name." Dustin said.

"What?" said Mike, after a beat of silence.

“Huh?” asked Lucas at the same time.

“What the hell does that even mean?” Max asked drowning out the others. El simply looked at Dustin like he had grown two heads.

“Philistines. It’s Oscar Wilde. I think. It means Will’s...uh...Gay.” Dustin explained.

“Why didn’t you just say that? Why do you have to make everything so complicated?” Lucas said, smacking Dustin’s arm.

“Will isn’t gay. C’mon guys.” Mike said.

“Just because he’s never had a girlfriend doesn’t make him gay. That would mean Dustin’s gay too.” Max said.

“Right? I mean, Will’s just a little...” Mike said, trailing off.

“Sensitive? Artistic? Shy? Effeminate? Not at all interested in girls?” Dustin asked, clearly trying to lead Mike.

“No. That’s not... I mean, it doesn’t mean... huh.” Mike said, deflating somewhat, mind clearly working.

“He would have told us if he was. I mean, come on. We’re totally his big, dysfunctional family, he tells us deeper stuff than that.” Max said. Mike pointed toward Max, nodding along his approval.

“You never know. I’d be scared as hell to tell anyone. I know its the eighties and all, but this is Hawkins. Hawkins might as well still be in the fifties. Trust me.” Lucas said. Mike was back to thinking again.

“He just needs to feel comfortable. Now that we’re all talking about it, I think that if we let him know its okay, he’ll probably tell us. We owe it to Will to help him on this. If we all got together, I bet we could even set him up. I heard about a sophomore we could introduce him to.” Dustin said.

“That... is a terrible idea Dustin.” Mike said. “Whether he is or not, we can’t just ambush him like that. He’d freak out.” Max just nodded emphatically.

“He has his reasons man, he’ll tell us if he wants us to know. Let it be.” Lucas added.

“It’s none of our business anyway. We shouldn’t bother Will.” El noted.

“Fine. Party member in distress, but we’ll just ignore it. Message received. Not going to say anything.” Dustin threw up his hands and slumped back into his seat.

In the present, Will sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. He did a few breathing exercises his therapist had given him for anxiety, and tried to settle down, or at least stop shaking. Will had come a long way in the last few years. Nightmares that were once a nightly constant sometimes didn’t appear for more than a week at a time. Panic attacks happened less regularly, and were less intense. All in all, he was recovering well considering all he’d been through. This, however, was a problem he hadn’t prepared for.

He knew his friends meant well enough. In fact, he was sure that any or all of them would walk straight into hell if it would help him. Thinking of it, three of them had tried, and one of them actually sort of literally had. They weren’t trying to hurt him. It was just that they were all profoundly stupid, apparently. “*Wits, not fireballs. Be Will the Wise.*” he told himself.

“So you all sit around, while I’m not there, and discuss my love life, and apparently make decisions about my sexuality, because you think I’m not capable of sorting these things out myself.” Will said, very calmly. “Am I getting that right?” He asked. Murmurs and nods from around the table. “And you came to the conclusion, that after half my life being called a fag and a fairy by every bully in school, not to mention my own bastard of a Dad, that they were right all along and I just never told you, my closest friends about it.”

No one dared speak, shame and embarrassment hanging to heavily over the group.

Will sighed again. "I'm not mad. Well, no, I'm really pissed off, but I guess I get it, and you were trying to help. In a really fucking stupid way. But, I'm not gay. If I was, I'd have told you. I love you guys, and I trust you guys, even if you are a bunch of assholes."

"So, for real, not at all? 'Cause it's totally cool if you are" Dustin piped up, drawing the ire of everyone at the table, and an actual "what the fuck" from Max.

"For real. I'm shy and I like art. And girls. They are not mutually exclusive." Will said, shaking his head at Dustin. That boy's mouth was going to get him killed one day.

"Okay." Dustin said, the whole thing rolling off of him like water off a duck. "Then can we set you up with a girl?" He asked. Will just put his head in his hands.

"Okay, I know Dustin is an actual moron, but if you ever want some help with the ladies, I have heard some things. You have kind of a little fan-club among the girls here Byers. Sensitive artist type and all." Max offered.

She wasn't just saying that either. Will had become fairly well known for his art, having won a few awards and contests. Add to that his troubled past, avoidance of most things social, hand-me-down band tees and faded jeans, and the mop of hair he kept swept back from his face these days, and Will had accidentally cultivated for himself quite the "tortured artist" persona.

"And you're cute." El added, earning a curious glance from Mike. She shrugged, like she had only just stated an obvious fact.

"I... Thanks? But, seriously don't." Will said, fighting off a blush. "I know you guys want to help, but I need some time still. I'm getting a lot better, but I still need to work on some stuff before I can even wrap my head around dating anyone. That's just a little too much to handle for me, okay?"

The others nodded and voiced their acceptance, Mike giving his shoulder a squeeze and muttering another small apology. He noticed the tots, but decided to let them go, all things considered.

“Well if Will doesn’t want your help, maybe we can work on getting me set up with a girlfriend instead?” Dustin asked.

“No.” Max, Lucas, and Mike said at once. El and Will couldn’t help but laugh.

“What? You were all willing to help Will a second ago, why not me?” Dustin asked.

“We like Will.” Max retorted simply, resuming her interrupted meal.

“I give you guys nothing but love and support, and you are very cruel to me. Seriously, this is an extreme lack of gratitude. I am very hurt.” Dustin said, mock sadness in his voice. Will snorted, and lunch continued on as usual. They could be annoying, intrusive, and downright weird, sure, but he wouldn’t trade his friends for anything.

Author's Note:

I also realize Dustin ends up looking a little bad in this. I love Dustin. The reason he's so front and center here is that he reminds me most of the friend in question who pulled this on me.